

Koppenhaver: What were your feelings while you were waiting for your first mission to come?

Albert: Oh apprehension. Because all through the barracks guys were telling us what it's like. You know, how hair raising it is, how bad it can be. You anticipated that. Well, our first mission was called a milk run. It was an easy mission. We didn't see any German fighters to shoot at which disappointed us because we were gung-ho. And we didn't get much flack bursting around us. So it was an easy mission. A day or two later when we went on another mission. It was a deep penetration into Germany. Munich, I think it was. Then we finally realized what we in for. But not all missions were like that. It's not like Memphis Belle where you had 25 missions where the airplane is falling apart and they're doing miraculous things. There were times when the missions weren't that difficult.

Koppenhaver: While in battle, did you see any devastating sites? Anything that was hard to see?

Albert: Yes. Number of occasion. We saw an airplane get hit, a direct hit and blow apart. No possibility of anybody getting out of it. We had some harrowing experiences when we couldn't get our bomb bay doors closed, which means we became a target because the Germans look for any crippled planes when you came off of the target, and they went for them because they couldn't defend themselves. So when we come off the target they were after us, and we had a pretty good air battle, that type of thing. Of course our crash landing was pretty harrowing too. I don't think too many people survive a crash landing.

Koppenhaver: What happened during the crash landing?

Albert: We were scheduled to go to Berlin on this mission. We actually went over the North Sea, and we were going inland and the mission was recalled because the weather forecast said we would be unable to bomb the target because it would be obscured with cloud coverage. So we were recalled, so that means when we come back over the North Sea, we took the fuses, we safetied the bombs, and dropped them into the North Sea, which means they sank to the bottom. And then we came in over the land. Everything was souped in, meaning there was nothing but cloud coverage. So we were at 22,000 feet, which was the highest we ever had the airplane. And we found an opening in the cloud coverage, and we got in, and we found this emergency field. At least we think it was an emergency field. Anyway, there was a B-24 cracked up on the long runway and we went in on the short runway. And when we landed, which means when we touched down at about 90 mph we hit the runway we were still doing about 50 or 55mph. We nosed over into a ditch and the plane caught on fire, nosed over. The bombardier and the navigator up front were sort of pinned inside. They were hurt pretty badly. The pilot and copilot got out and they drug them away from the plane. And when it was all over, the shells were firing off because of the heat, the fire. And it was just a pile of molten metal when it was finished.

Koppenhaver: What was your most memorable mission?

Albert: Let me think about this. My most memorable mission was when we were towards the end of our tour of duty. We flew down along the coast of France and in southern France. We cut in, and we were delivering supplies to French marquis where the people were uprising against the Germans at the time. And we flew in there and instead of bombs were there big canisters and each one was dropped with a color parachute, the color parachute designating the contents of the unit; ammunition, guns, food, medical supplies, those types of things. And it was just a joyous thing to see. Not that there was any combat or shooting or anything like that. We

actually dropped them at a pretty low altitude and we could see these French people coming out of the woods to gather this stuff up. And one other one too. We bombed an oil refinery in Czech Slovakia, Brux I think it was. And they had been building it for years. We bombed it we were told, the day it opened. And the flame and smoke from that thing was up so high it was up to around 15,000 feet. I mean that thing really burned. And that was a big problem for the Germans, getting oil. 'Cause they had no oil of their own. They were getting their oil from what they called coal gasification plants, where they took coal, and they were able to make oil out of it.

Koppenhaver: Do you recall the day your service ended after your tour?

Albert: The day my service ended, totally ended. I was in Davis Montanfield in Tucson Arizona. I was working for the standardization board, I had just come back from Pueblo, Colorado where I was going to central fire control school for B-29s, and I thought I'd go back to Davis Montan and do that kind of work, standardization of training, but some guy came to the dorm and said, "Hey Albert, you're supposed to report down to the orderly room. They want to get rid of you." I had been avoiding it because I didn't know if I wanted to stay in. I was thinking of seriously staying in and being a career GI, but thankfully I didn't, because I wouldn't have gone to college if I'd stayed in. I know that.

Koppenhaver: What was the "Lucky Bastards Club"?

Albert: The lucky bastards club was an honorary group where they just gave you a little bit of a treat after you completed your tour of duty. Meaning that if you really lasted through it all because the odds were so great against you that they called you a lucky bastard, and they treated you with a steak dinner.

Koppenhaver: What was the trip home like? What did you think about on the way home?

Albert: My trip home was on the Queen Mary. We went through a bunch of bases in England and finally went up to Scotland, Glasgow, I think it was. And we were there for about seven or eight days. The ship finally left. We sailed after two weeks and came across the Atlantic. I would've been like a lot of enlisted men, trying to live on kidney stew for 2 weeks, but I was able to wrangle a job working in the officer's mess where I ate very, very good food. Top notch food. And I survived that way. And we come into Halifax, Nova Scotia and who got off the ship, but Winston Churchill. That's why we were delayed in Glasgow before we left. Churchill was coming to Canada to have a meeting with Roosevelt. I don't think Stalin was involved with it. It was just Roosevelt. And from there we come down to New York. We disembarked in New York. They took us right over to camp Kilmer in New Jersey. They fed us, cleaned us up, and within 12 hours we were given a pass to go home. I come home. I think I was home for two weeks. That's when I met my wife. I didn't meet my wife, I met the woman that was going to be my wife. And she chased me until I caught her.

Mrs. Albert: I chased you till you caught me. Oh that's funny.

Koppenhaver: Describe the moment you snuck up behind your mom buying produce.

Albert: Oh man, that was a joyous, joyous moment. I actually come into Lebanon, it was maybe 9, 9:30. The train come down from Harrisburg at Eighth and Railroad street. I walked out to Tenth and Guilford. The huckster's truck was facing west. She was buying something from him. And I put my finger to my mouth to silence the huckster, and I snuck up behind her. I

thought she was going to die of a heart attack when she turned around. She started crying. The huckster started crying, and I started crying. To this day, it makes me cry. I know that I'm not an extra religious person, but I know my mother's prayers were answered. Believe me. I'm sorry.

Mrs. Albert: Do you want a handkerchief? It's okay honey. It's hard not to do things like that when you think about that. You're okay.

Koppenhaver: When you got back did you work right away, or did you go to school?

Albert: When I got back I... Well, at the time, there was a lot of people being discharged, and there weren't a lot of jobs available. Some guys that had jobs before the war went back into them, but I didn't really have a returnable job when I came back. So I joined the 52-20 club, which was part of the GI bill that gave you \$20 a week for 52 weeks until you got settled down. I drew 2 checks and the guys said to me "You gotta go to work, you gotta get a job." So I went and got a few odd jobs. Then ultimately I got a job at the gap discharging officers, and my job title was computer, believe it or not. Then I worked that job until about April. All the time I was going to night school, brushing up on my math, taking the interest to get into college and pass the entry exam. The East Strausbury State Teachers College, and I went there. I started in '46, graduated in 3 years. Got my first job on Long Island at West Hampton beach in the beautiful Hamptons. Taught there for three years and left there and went into closer to New York but still out on suburban Long Island. At Babylon. I went there as a teacher, science teacher. And football coach. Three years later I took the basketball job and gave up the football. And that's what I did. I coached and taught. I became the department chairman, and ultimately I was the math-science curriculum coordinator. And that's the job I retired from.

Koppenhaver: Was your education supported by the G.I. bill?

Albert: Yes, thank God. I want to do a little editorializing here. Think about it. The millions, probably 3 million. I don't know that fact or not. But if it wouldn't have been for the GI bill, we would not have had the professional doctors, engineers, teachers, and other professionals that we needed during the '50's and the '60's during the most rapid expansion in the country. We'd have been short in all those capacities. All those jobs. So, the GI bill paid for itself many times over. It paid for all my college, 3 years. You were allowed \$500 a month, plus the first \$65 a month for living expenses. Then it was up to \$75 a month. It paid for my master's degree at Penn State. So it was very, very helpful. I doubt if I'd have ever gone to college without the GI bill. And there are a lot of guys that way. And we really revolutionized college in many ways, they claimed. The colleges claim we were the best group of students that they ever had go through the college because, first of all, guys were more mature, and they knew what they were there for. In fact, I'm a big proponent. If it was up to me, we'd have compulsory military training in this country. Every guy would have to go in the service for about two years. Whether you liked it or not.

Koppenhaver: Do you still keep in touch with any of your service men that you were with?

Albert: No, I did keep in touch until a few years ago when my copilot, who later became our pilot, he died. He was out in Nebraska. And before that, it was my tail gunner, Danny Kinney from Oregon, but I have no other record of any of the other guys being alive. I'm a survivor I guess because I'm the last one from my college group, last one from my air crew. I'm lucky.

Koppenhaver: What medals did you earn throughout your tour?

Albert: What medals? Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with Four Clusters, the European-African Combat Medal with Two Battle Stars. Those are the ones I'm the proudest of.

Koppenhaver: Did you join a veterans organization?

Albert: I belonged to the VFW for awhile. Yes, and I belonged to the American Legion for awhile. I no longer am. I'm not a joiner.

Koppenhaver: Explain your life after World War II.

Albert: After World War II, I had a pretty good life. Yes, after college I had a good job. Good teaching job, good coaching career, and I was able to get training programs for additional college paid by the government. 1958 at Cornell University 1959 through 62 at Anny college in Ohio. 1965 with Princeton in their geology camp in Montana. 1969 at Northern Arizona university. And 1972 Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute. And that was all money that was subsidized by the government. So in addition to that, we were able to do some traveling. We managed to get a vacation every once in awhile. We didn't have any children, which is to our regrets. But we had a good life overall.

Koppenhaver: What are your views on the occurring Iraqi war?

Albert: I hate it. I despise it. First of all, I don't think we should've even been there. I think what we're doing is putting an awful lot of stress on our military in an event when we would really have to fight an important war. I don't consider that to be an important war.

Koppenhaver: How did your service and experiences affect your life?

Albert: I think it affected in it in a way in which I went about my life and the way I did things. The military did give me discipline. It helped me grow up. Helped me analyze situations along with my education afterwards so it affected me, definitely. But I can truly say, that I've never suffered any bad effects of soldiering, which I'm thankful for. I once in awhile think of certain things and they might be scary, but I don't suffer any real stress from it. I learned to put things out of my way when I want to.

Koppenhaver: Do you have any final thoughts?

Albert: Yes, I like what you're doing. I think you're a couple of nice young ladies. I think your teacher must be a pretty good person. They gave you a good project to work on. That's about it.

Gilbertson: Thank you so much.